

JOHNSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL OVERVIEW

2024-2025

Prepared by :

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Social Services Director

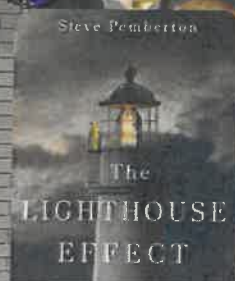
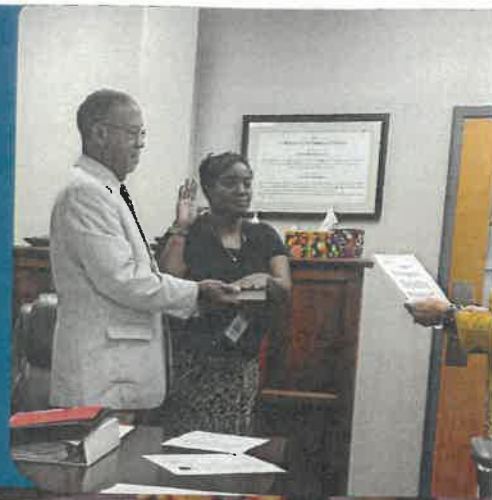


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Director's Message

As the Director of Johnston County Department of Social Services I am pleased to present our Annual Overview for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. This overview embodies our commitment to enhancing the well-being of our community and highlighting the significant strides we have made in servicing our customers while incorporating a family centered approach.



Throughout the year the staff and administration with the support of our County Commissioners, County Manager, Rick Hester and the DSS Board, has worked tirelessly to enhance the culture of the agency, provide federally and state mandated services to support the customers we serve and to provide resources to those in need. As we continue to face challenges head-on, we will focus on adapting our programs to address the evolving needs of our growing community, while being compliant with mandates.

This overview not only showcases our achievements and commitments to our community and customers, but also reflects on our commitment to our staff. It highlights our key initiatives, areas of growth, the impact of the services we offer to the community, and our collaboration with various internal and external partners. We restructured our agency, and also formed two divisions, the Economic Services and Medicaid, to include additional management staff and the Resource Department, which includes the Visitation, Interpreting and Mailroom units. We also contracted with Information Inc, to utilize their Daysheet and iiReception Systems. These software programs assist in streamlining operations, enhancing internal transparency, improving accurate state and federal reporting and maximizing reimbursement to the county.

We continue to monitor the agency's workflow, to identify and minimize any disruptions of services to our customers while monitoring agency spending. With the addition of the Resource Department, we focused on our organizational efficiency and improved the overall experience for our customers and staff. The Visitation Unit focuses on facilitating a smooth and organized visitation process for the children and families that we serve. The Interpreter Unit has been created to bridge language barriers and provide essential support for non-English speaking customers and decreased the cost of contracting this service. Lastly, the Mailroom Unit will serve as a centralized hub for all incoming and outgoing correspondence where staff will begin scanning incoming mail and documents into the agency's case management system, improving efficiency and workload. We are also collaborating with the nationally known, Isaiah 117 House, which offers a place for children and youth in care to spend time with their families in a homelike setting which plans to open this year. Johnston County will be the home to the first Isaiah 117 House in North Carolina.

I am also honored to serve as a local member of the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), a national organization that focuses on advancing the well-being of individuals, families and communities nationwide. The leadership team looks forward to our continued growth in our community, development of our agency staff and incorporating innovative processes to enhance and strengthen the services we provide to the residents of Johnston County.

Christine M Dowdell, MSW
DSS Director
Johnston County Department of Social Services

Message from DSS Board Chairman

It is my privilege to serve as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Johnston County Department of Social Services for the fiscal year 2024-2025. This Annual Overview will highlight the many successes of the department. Too often, social services agencies are recognized only when things go wrong. This overview is a summary of the efforts of the three hundred and thirty dedicated staff members who see their work not as a job, but a mission.



This is the agency's first year under the leadership of Ms. Christine M. Dowdell. She has very quickly assessed the needs of the department and instituted changes that have led to increased efficiency in service delivery and improved employee morale. Johnston County DSS is now recognized as a leader on both the state and national levels.

The demands for social services are very high and are continuing to grow along with our fast-growing county. However, we have staff members who are committed to providing services to the members of our community who are in need.

As you read this overview, I hope you will recognize that we have an agency of which we can be very proud!

James Coleman
DSS Chairman
Johnston County Department of Social Services

Johnston County Social Services Board



The function of the Board is to make policies and recommendations governing the administration and operation of the Johnston County Department of Social Services.

The County appoints two members of the five member Board, two are appointed by the State and one appointed by other Board members. The Board meets on the fourth Tuesday Monthly.

*Created by General Statutes 108A-1

2024-2025 Board Members

James O. Coleman
Chair,
Smithfield, NC



Susan Watson
Vice Chair,
Selma, NC



Patrick E. Harris
Smithfield, NC



Kimberly Wooten
Smithfield, NC



Angelique Legette
Smithfield, NC



Agency Overview

In pursuit of fulfilling our agency's mission and realizing its visionary goals, a strategic restructuring of the department was necessary. This was done to enhance agency internal and external collaboration, shift the agency's culture, improve employee morale, streamline services, and strengthen our relationship with the legal team by supporting the addition of legal staff. In alignment with our organizational culture shift, we have transitioned from utilizing the term "client" to "customer." A minor change such as this can significantly impact staff and customer interactions.

Each month staff have the opportunity to learn more about the agency during our agency-wide "Reunion Monday" webinars. During the webinar, staff and program leadership share highlights of service provision, accomplishments and other agency related information. This is also an opportunity to hear about agency events, training opportunities, county, state and federal initiatives and changes or learn from other stakeholders such as the legal team.

These efforts support our agency's structure, long term vision and values that guide our work of providing family centered services. The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, defines the family centered model, as one, *which views families as having the capacity to make informed decisions and act on them. It differs from models in which professionals make decisions alone or with only the assistance of the family.*

Mission Statement

The mission of Johnston County Social Services is to serve, aid and protect needy and vulnerable children and adults in ways that strengthen and preserve families. We implement Human Services programs that are intended to promote the health, wellbeing, self-sufficiency and protection of families, children and adults within our community.

Vision Statement

To be an organization which promotes self-sufficiency and assures the protection of vulnerable individuals. We strive to have an organization which values the needs of our customers, the contributions of our staff, and the participation of our community. This vision shall be achieved through a culture which encourages continuous improvement.

Johnston County DSS Guiding Core Values

Integrating the agency's Guiding Core Values into our current practices allows us to create an environment that is safe and nurturing for both our customers and staff.

Empowerment - Fostering the capacity for customers and communities to take control of their lives and make informed decisions.

Dignity and Worth of the Person - Recognizing and respecting the inherent value of each person, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Cultural Competence - Understanding and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds and tailoring services to meet the unique needs of different populations.

Collaboration and Partnership - Working with customers, families and stakeholders to assist them in developing solutions that will improve outcomes for them and their families.

Integrity - Upholding ethical standards and behaving in a trustworthy manner at all times.

Self-Determination - Supporting customers in making their own choices and decisions about the services they may be entitled to.

Administration Division

The Johnston County Department of Social Services' Administrative Division includes department heads from the Business Office, Children & Adult Services Programs, Continuous Quality Improvement, IT, Personnel, Medicaid, and Economic Services departments. One significant change was to separate the Medicaid and Economic Services divisions, with each being led by a Division Director, due to the complexity of each program.

The agency continues to focus on filling vacant positions within all departments in the agency which often mirror the practices of other DSS agencies across the state. In April, DSS collaborated with County Human Resources to facilitate the agency's first Job Fair which was very successful. There were 61 in person interviews completed resulting in the hiring of 14 staff throughout the agency.

DSS Business Department

The responsibilities of the JCDSS Business Office is to assist the Director in developing, preparing, overseeing and submitting the agency's annual budget to the County Manager and Finance Department, and all fiscal functions for the agency. The budget amount for the fiscal year is over \$48 million dollars. The department directs and coordinates all administrative and fiscal operations of the agency, ensuring efficiency and compliance with policies and procedures to ensure accurate reimbursement to the county. We work with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and internal and external partners to ensure all fiscal matters are compliant with county, state and federal policies and mandates.

The Business Department also collects and processes payments towards customers' trusts accounts and ensures timely accurate recovery of funds.

Housekeeping

Housekeeping staff are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness, order and hygiene in agency buildings and workspaces. It encompasses a wide range of activities like cleaning, organizing, maintaining supplies, and ensuring a comfortable and safe environment. Our staff do an excellent job of maintaining and cleaning all five DSS buildings.

DSS IT Department

The DSS Information Technology (IT) Department plays a critical role in ensuring the smooth operation, security and innovation of technology systems within our organization. Our team is responsible for managing and supporting a wide range of IT services, including infrastructure, cybersecurity, software development, and user support. From July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, the IT Department received 4,615 tickets for user support. Current or upcoming technology projects include the following:

PATH NC

The Partnership and Technology Hub for North Carolina (PATH NC) is a statewide information system designed to improve outcomes for children and families by providing child welfare staff across the state with real-time data and decision making-tools, along with reports and analytics. The state began transitioning to this system in June 2025. Our agency will go live on September 8, 2025.

Transitioning to PATH NC requires that child welfare staff complete a series of online and in-person training offered throughout the state. In the next fiscal year, we will host PATH NC in-person training sessions in our newest building. The most recent being in August 2025 where 22 participants and two trainers with the majority of them traveling to Johnston County from other county agencies, and staying overnight in the county.

In the next fiscal year, our agency will host three additional weeks of PATH NC in-person training that will include participants from other county DSS agencies. Having the opportunity to host training locally offers many benefits. It gives our agency employees priority seating in state training which reduces the county's travel related expenses for employees to travel to out-of-county training sites. Finally, it contributes to the local economy when out-of-county participants stay in nearby hotels, eat at area restaurants and shop at local retail stores. Having a dedicated learning center and state of the art technology in the future site of Johnston County DSS will continue to benefit this agency's employees by offering more opportunities for learning locally while also contributing to Johnston's growing economy.

Telephone System - Cisco Webex (Advanced Reporting and Call Queues)

The Cisco Webex phone system has proven to be a highly effective upgrade, offering features such as advanced call reporting, dynamic call queue management which helps to minimize customer hold times, and ensure efficient routing to the appropriate staff members.

Virtual Machines

Virtual machines provide a secure and seamless remote work environment, mirroring in-office desktops and ensuring no data is stored on personal devices. This setup has made remote work both practical and secure. Use across the agency has resulted in increased system uptime, enhanced data security, centralized control over information, and reduces the risk from unauthorized access to physical equipment

AgileFleet - Automated Car Management

This system will help eliminate the need for staff to oversee car key distribution when using agency vehicles. The fleet key kiosk system helps to streamline operations, enhance security and improve accountability through 24/7 access, automation and real time tracking.

Customer Kiosk for DSS Main Lobby

This touch screen kiosk allows customers to scan documents and important information directly to their caseworker without having to wait in line or drop off the physical mail in an agency drop box. It also provides customers the ability to interact with the county and state agencies websites.

Continuous Quality Improvement

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team supports and aids in the development of employees through quality assurance, training and staff development. We utilize the NCDHHS CQI Cycle of collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, incorporating the information to begin working to identify, implement, and monitor solutions. Quality Assurance activities include but are not limited to auditing records in Child and Adult Services, Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR), foster care funding eligibility determinations, and data reporting to ensure that we are compliant with county and state mandates.



IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Funding Training, April 10, 2025



IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Funding Training Team

An essential function of the CQI team is coordinating and facilitating training. This year the team led the coordination of the “Lighthouse Effect” training held at Johnston County Community College in January 2025; partnered with the Family & Children’s Resource Program at the UNC School of Social Work to train child services and Medicaid staff on child services on determining and maximizing foster care eligibility funding; coordinated training facilitated by the legal team; trained 82 employees in car seat safety and assisted with agency wide implementation projects.

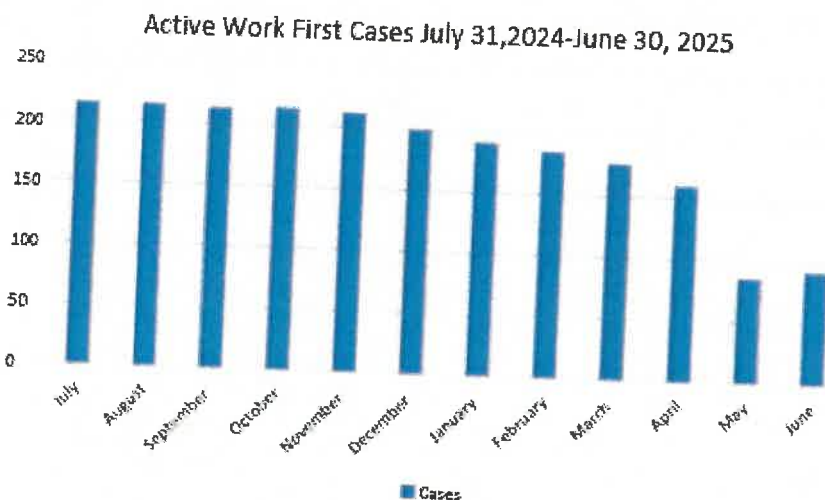
Economic Services

Division Highlights

The Economic Services Division provides services to families to help them improve their economic well-being and promote self sufficiency. We provide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Energy Programs, Food & Nutrition Services (FNS), Child Care Subsidies and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation. Customers are able to apply for these services online (ePass), in-person, by telephone and mail. The agency reception area averages 1,517 customers per month.

Work First Family Assistance (TANF)

Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) is North Carolina's name for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF). The program is designed to offer supportive services to families with obtaining and maintaining employment while receiving a short-term cash payment for minor children under the age of 18.



The number of child-only cases averages around 202, which are managed by the Economic Services staff.

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)

Food and Nutrition Services helps eligible people with limited incomes supplement their budgets so they can purchase food. FNS must maintain an average of 95% timeliness for

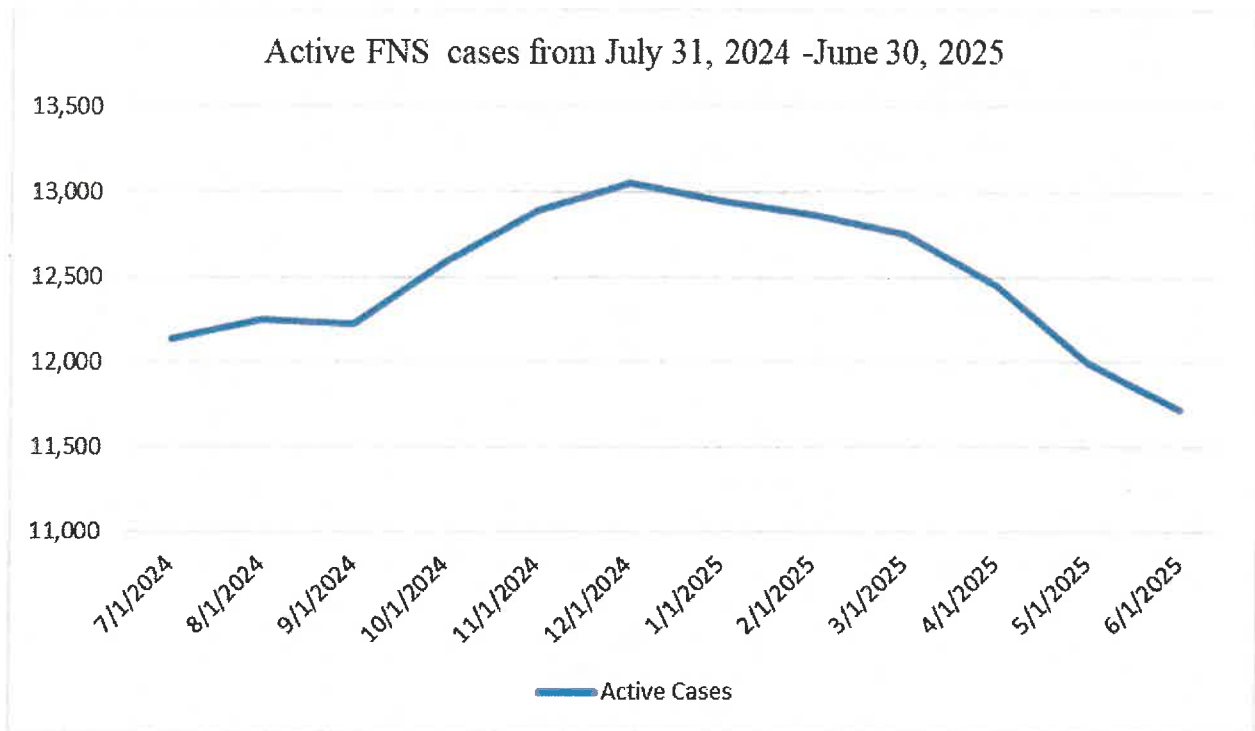
processing applications and recertifications, ensuring that the families of Johnston County receive eligible services they are entitled to. Beginning July 1, 2024 until June 2025 Johnston County has averaged a 98.90% timeliness rate in applications and a 99.60% timeliness in recertifications.

There have been 19,543 households equaling 44,094 persons, who were issued FNS benefits from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, totaling \$54,060,341.00 in FNS benefits issued this fiscal year which has helped to stimulate the local economy.

During the fiscal year there has been a small decline in active cases, from February to April, possibly due to customers receiving their tax returns. This continued decline is not typical, but could also be due to an influx of jobs in the central region of North Carolina. Johnston County's unemployment rate of 3.10% is lower than North Carolina's average of 3.7% and this could be a contributing factor in the decreased number of FNS applicants.

Johnston County assisted with Disaster Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (DSNAP) for hurricane Helene. Johnston County had 13 workers who took a total of 286 applications and out of those 221 customers from the affected counties were approved.

Summary of Active Food Stamp cases from July 2024 through June 2025



Crisis & Energy Assistance

Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) provides a one-time annual vendor payment to help eligible families pay their heating expenses. The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program has distributed approximately \$865,964.70 since July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 to assist families with paying their heating bills.

The Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) serves individuals and families who are experiencing or in danger of experiencing a heating or cooling-related crisis. The Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) has distributed approximately \$1,091,252.02 to assist with heating and cooling assistance from July 2024 through June 2025.

Childcare Subsidy

The Childcare Subsidy program uses state and federal funds to provide subsidized child care services to eligible families. Customers may be eligible to receive child care assistance if they are working or are attempting to find work; are in school or in a job training program; if their child is receiving child protective services; if their child needs care to support child welfare services; or if their family is experiencing a crisis or if their child has developmental needs.

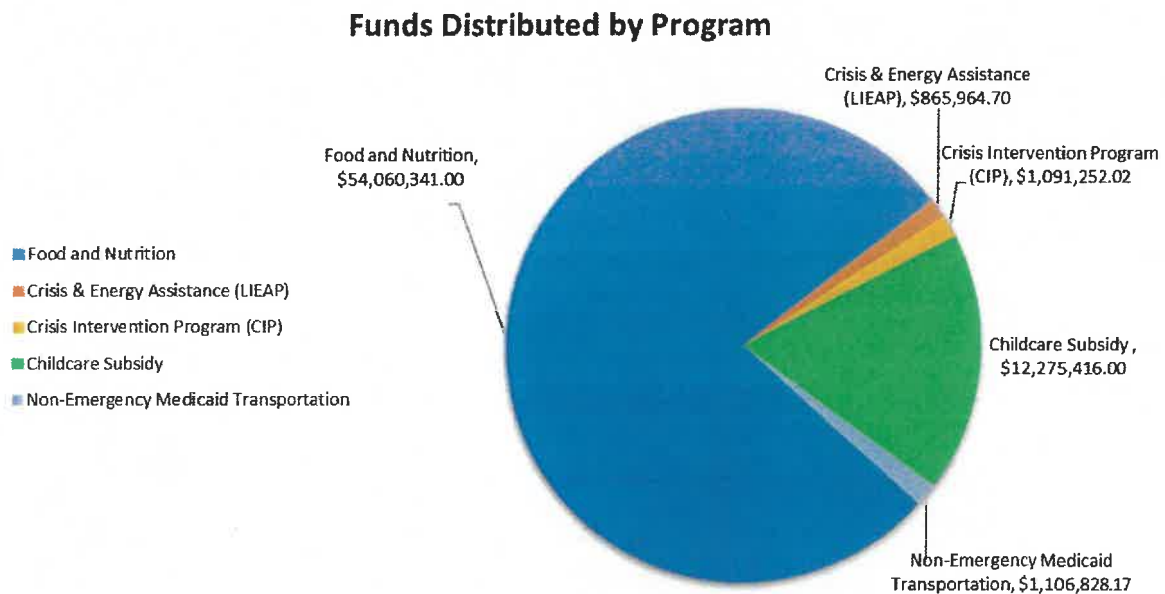
Johnston County has a waiting list for Child Care and as of June 30, 2025, there were 194 children on the waitlist. The spending co-efficient was at its highest 158% in July 2024. As of June 2025 it is 93%, which allows Johnston to start selecting children from its waiting list. In total, from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, childcare has spent \$12,275,416.00 in assisting families to maintain employment.

Program Integrity

The Program Integrity (PI) Unit ensures the integrity of agency programs and maintains accountability in expenditure of public funds through prevention, detection and investigation of fraud and abuse by consumers. Program Integrity has recouped \$353,702.38 from benefit overpayments from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. During the fiscal year Program Integrity will work with our legal team and court system to recoup money from consumers who were found to have received benefits fraudulently.

Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation (NEMT)

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) services to transport eligible Medicaid recipients to their medical and or mental health appointments if receiving services through the Medicaid Standard Plan, a Tailored Plan, the EBCI Tribal Option or the NC Medicaid Direct program. NEMT has expended approximately \$1,106,828.17 from July 1, 2024 through June 3, 2025.



Medicaid Services

Division Highlights

NC Medicaid is a state and federally funded program that provides health coverage to eligible low-income individuals, ensuring access to essential medical services. The program is divided into several categories to meet the diverse needs of customers.

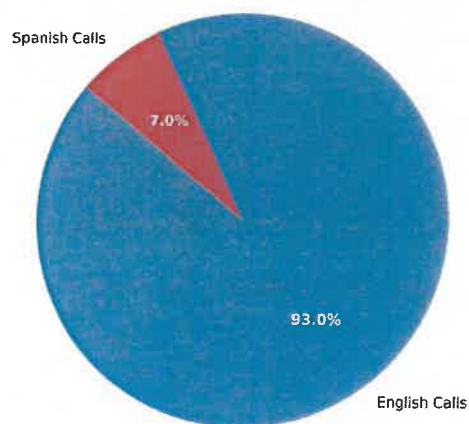
- Family and Children's Medicaid supports low income families, by providing children, parents, and pregnant women with medical and preventive coverage.
- Adult Medicaid provides health coverage for qualifying low income adults, including those with disabilities, offering services such as doctor visits, hospital care and prescriptions.
- Long Term Care Medicaid (LTC) assists individuals who require ongoing care in nursing homes, assisted living facilities or at home through community based services, helping them maintain their quality of life.
- Special Assistance Medicaid provides financial and medical support to eligible individuals residing in adult care homes or receiving in-home care.

The estimated resources budget for Medicaid for this fiscal year is approximately \$8,470,923.00. The federal and state government reimburses or contributes to Medicaid related services in the amount of \$5,784,231 and Johnston County's estimated contribution is \$2,686,692. This data demonstrates how Medicaid funds provide millions of dollars into the Johnston County and North Carolina economy which supports healthcare access, job creation and local health providers.

Call Center

The Call Center, launched in October 2024, and in July 2024, a Supervisor and additional staff were added. The Call Center has significantly enhanced access to services for our community and works in collaboration with our IT Department to ensure accurate data from the center.

Call Center Volume Distribution
Total Calls: 45,559



English Calls: 42,372 and Spanish Calls: 3,187

Our IT Department has assisted the Call Center with implementing a call-back feature to improve customer satisfaction, reduce call abandonment and increase accessibility. The Call Center also ensures that Johnston County is in compliance with the Franklin vs Kinsley Medicaid requirements.

Call Center Average Wait and Handle Times

<i>Average Wait Time in Queue</i>	<i>Average Handle Time</i>
English: 2 minutes, 11 seconds	English: 1 minute, 42 seconds
Spanish: 1 minute, 24seconds	Spanish: 3 minutes, 50 seconds

Productivity and System Improvements

The division has implemented productivity tracking tools and new reporting structures that enhance our ability to monitor timeliness, accuracy and overall performance. These tools have resulted in faster issue resolution and more reliable internal reporting. As a result, the Medicaid Division processed 6,109 applications and 32,766 recertifications across all programs.

On May 1, 2025, we launched the Change Team Unit to enhance operational efficiency and allow frontline staff to focus on improving Medicaid processing. This unit processed change reports and updates, improving efficiency and customer service across the division.

Audits & Monitoring

All counties are required to participate in the Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit (REDA), and Single County Audits. The agency is awaiting the final REDA and Single County results performed this fiscal year. The agency continues to provide ongoing training to identify and address agency trends. The Quality Assurance staff continue to monitor and provide training to Medicaid and Economic staff to augment performance and service delivery as well as compliance with state and federal mandates.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

The Medicaid Division has strengthened stakeholder engagement through quarterly meetings with the local hospital, this has fostered communication and alignment. Meet and Greet events between Medicaid and hospital staff have helped build rapport and improve collaboration. Additionally, the division actively partners with the Medicaid representatives from NCDHHS and local DSS agencies, to enhance policy training and ensure statewide clarity and consistency.

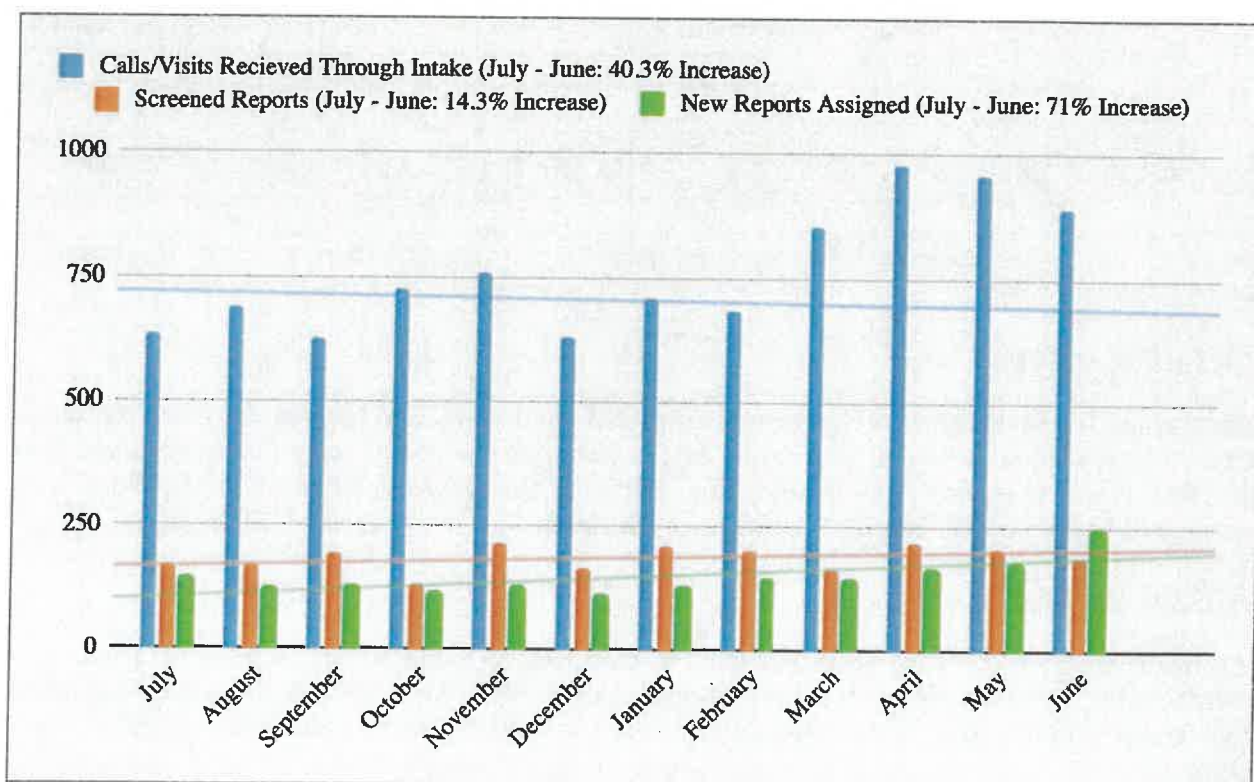
Children's Services

Division Highlights

The Children Services Department helps to ensure the safety and well-being of children who are alleged to be abused, neglected, or dependent while preserving the family unit when possible. We focus on utilizing the Family Centered Approach, while empowering families and caregivers with the tools and resources needed to be successful to care for their children.

Reports can be received by telephone, walk-ins, fax, and or email. Our policies and practices are governed by the North Carolina General Statue §7B-100 which gives the agency legal authority to intervene in cases involving child abuse, neglect and or dependency. Social workers investigate the allegations of child abuse neglect and or dependency, provide services to children and families in their homes.

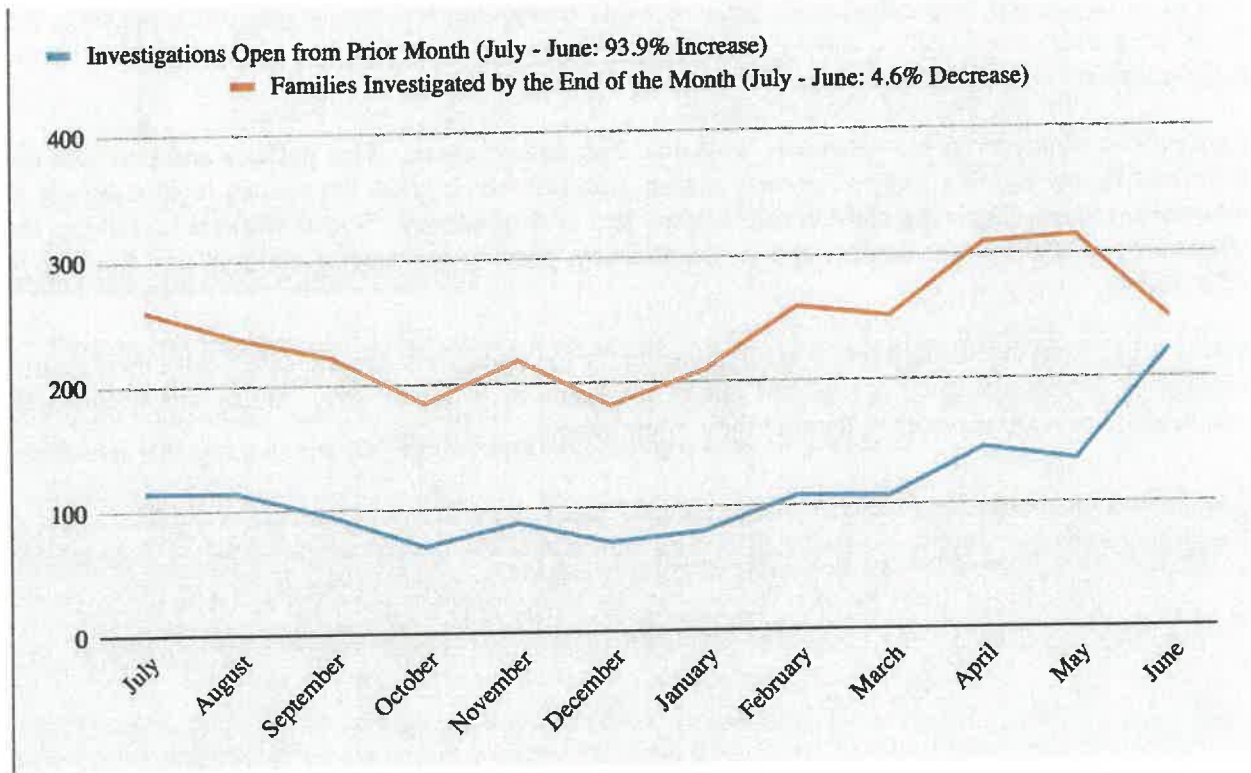
When it has been determined that it is not possible for the children to remain safely with their family, kinship or fictive kin, they are placed out of the home or in foster care. When this occurs staff continues to provide services to them in their environment.



CPS Intake FY 24-25

Child Protective Services (CPS)

Child Protective Services are legally mandated, non-voluntary services for families that encompass services for maltreated children (abused, neglected and or dependent) and those who are at imminent risk of harm due to the actions of, or lack of protection by, the child's parent or caregiver. As of June 30, 2025, there have been 1,701 reports assigned to CPS teams for assessment of safety and risk.



CPS Investigations FY 24-25

On-Call/After Hours

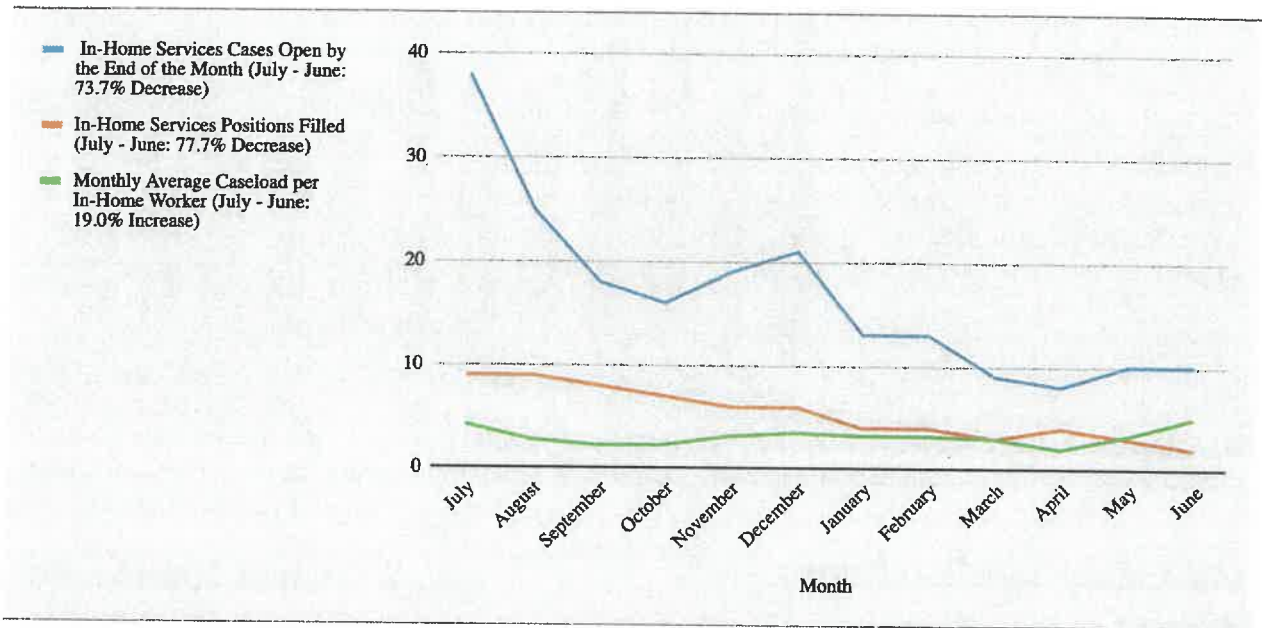
The agency is mandated to receive reports suspected child abuse and neglect, therefore we have a Child Abuse Hotline available 24 hours/7 days a week, as a portal of entry for children and their families. From November 2024 through June 2025, the On-Call/After Hours team responded to an average of 81 calls and screened 35 intake reports a month.

In-Home Services

At the completion of a CPS Assessment, if the case is found to be in need of services or substantiated, In-Home Services are provided to the family. During this time the social worker and the family work together to develop and implement a service plan to address the identified needs from the CPS Assessment. The parent/caregiver learns and identifies ways to enhance their parenting practices to allow the children to remain safely in their home.

If the risk increases for the children, court intervention may be sought at that time. A social worker may visit the children and their family in their home at a minimum of two times per month or more if needed to monitor the family's progress and ensure the safety of the children. The agency has seen a

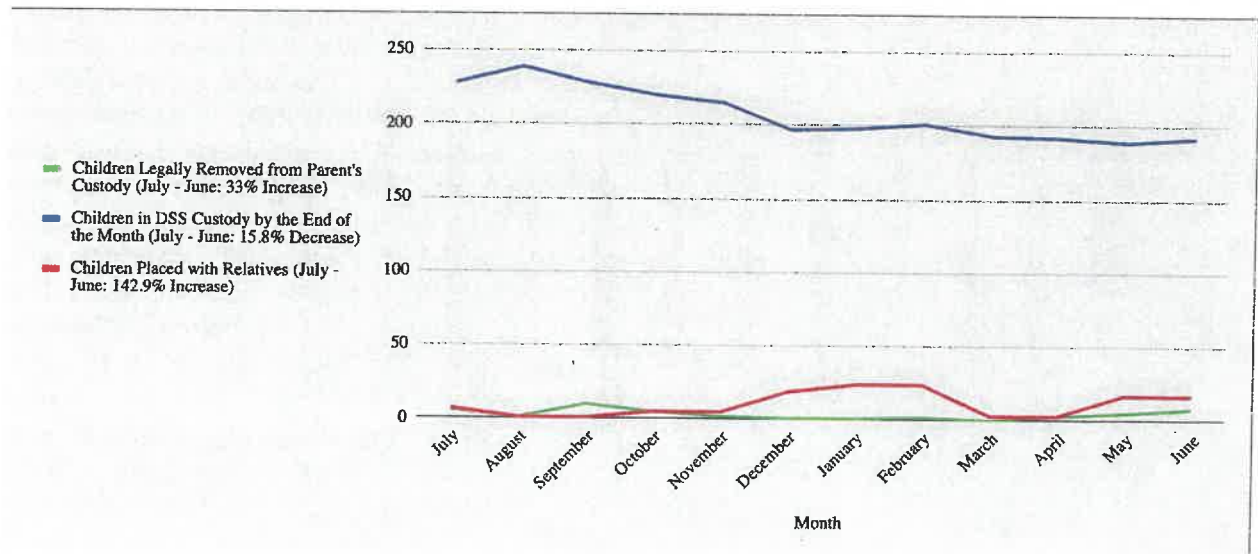
decline in the number of In-Home Services cases that are open within the agency which can be attributed to the increase in identifying safety and risk issues and front loading services in the assessment phase and providing a family centered approach



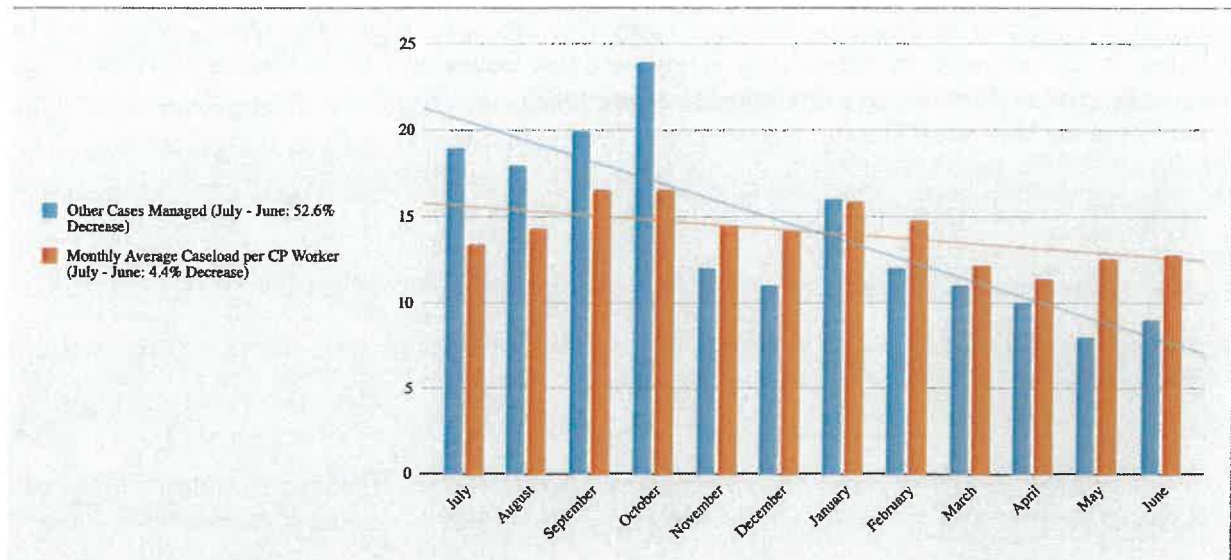
In- Home Services Data FY 24-25

Permanency Planning (Foster Care)

Permanency Planning Services are provided to children who must be separated from their own parents or caretakers when they are unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection and care.



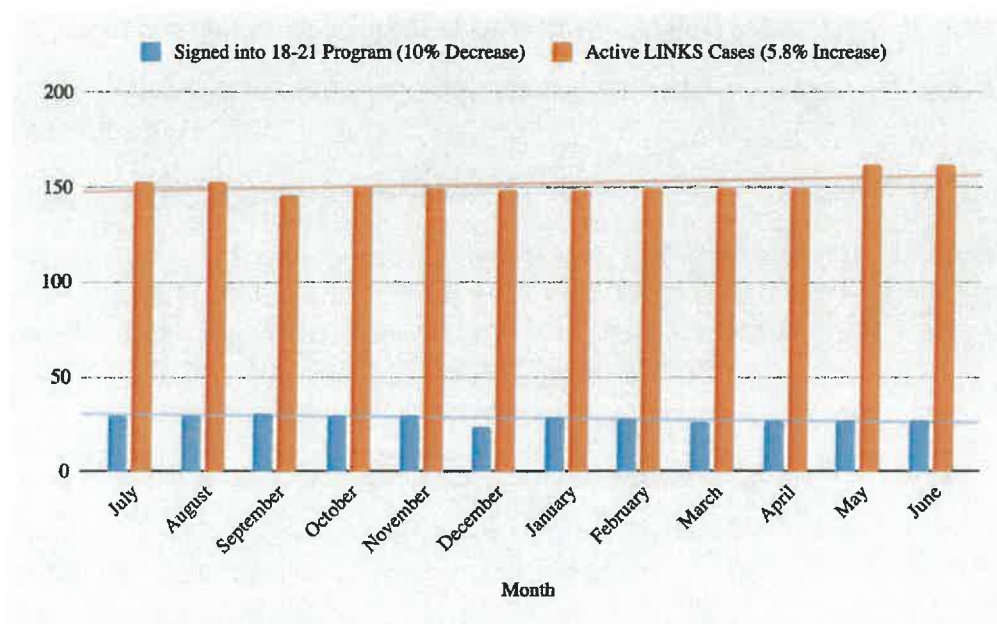
Permanency Planning Data FY 24-25



Caseload by CP Worker FY 24-24

LINKS / Foster Care 18-21 Program

This program is available for children ages 13-18 to learn important life skills through the LINKS program as well as the Foster Care 18-21 program. The 18-21 program is voluntary and offers ongoing support to youth who have aged out of the department's custody, which may include housing, child care, employment referrals, and educational support.



Links/ Foster Care 18-21 Program Data FY 24-25

Adoptions

The agency recruits and completes adoption services for youth in the agency's custody who are legally free for adoption. They also provide private adoption services, which may include step-parent, independent and or relative adoptions, where no prior DSS involvement is required

Visitation/Transportation Unit

The Visitation/Transportation Unit supports family reunification and permanency by transporting children to their medical and mental health appointments, and visits with their families and siblings. Transportation services are only provided for children who receive services from the department. From August 2024 through June 2025, the unit accumulated a total of 2,254 hours of service and managed over 1,021 visitation/transportation requests.

Foster Home Licensing

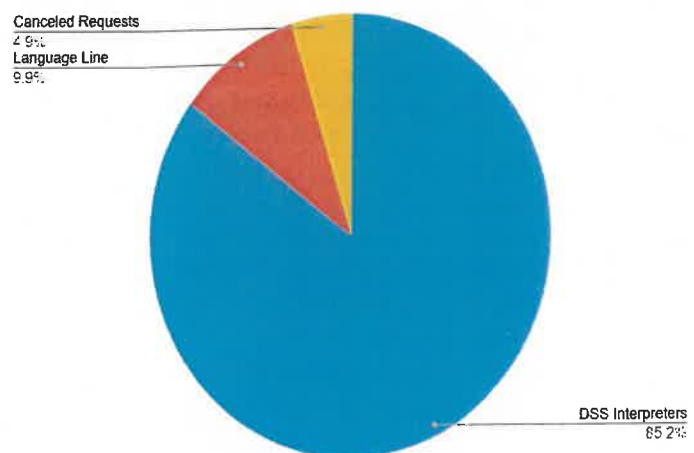
Licensing staff recruit and provide training for potential foster and adoptive parents. Licensing staff establishes and maintains partnerships with businesses, churches & community groups, we currently have 54 licensed foster homes.

Child and Family Teams (CFT)

Child and Family Team Meetings are required to consist of any support identified by the family, including but not limited to family members, community supports, legal custodians, and extended family members.

Interpreter Unit

The Interpreter Unit is a new unit that was developed as part of the department's restructuring to extend the number of staff that can provide interpreting services to the customers we serve. This unit not only provides services at the agency, they also provide services in the community and accompany social workers to home visits, as well as visitation and medical appointments. They also serve on rotation to assist with providing services to customers and social workers at court hearings and afterhours. The purpose for this unit is to assure that the same quantity and quality of DSS services are provided to all customers required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Interpreter Unit assists with facilitating communication between non-English and or Limited English Proficient (LEP) customers and staff members for various programs and services.



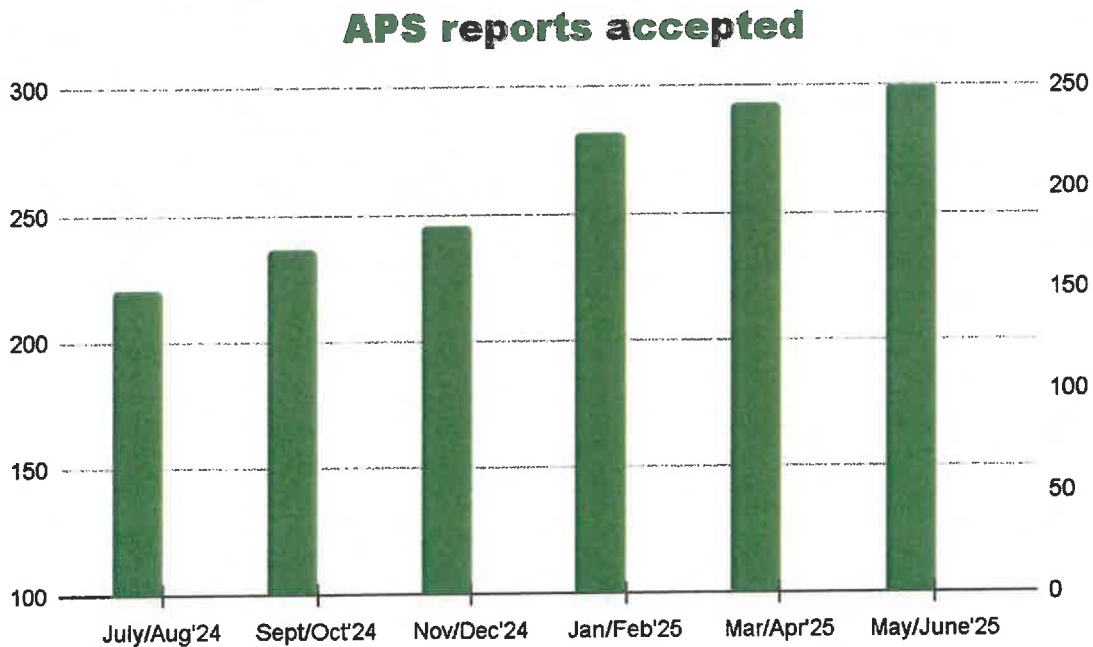
Adult & Family Services

Division Highlights

Adult & Family Services provides supportive services to adults and families in private residents and facilities, enhancing their self-determination in meeting their medical and mental health needs.

Adult Protective Services (APS)

This program serves abused, neglected, and exploited adults by receiving reports and evaluating the need for protective services. Adult Protective Services involves emergency services from reports of abused, neglected, and exploited adults with disabilities. Johnston County has seen an increase in Adult Protective Services reports.



Adult Guardianship

JCDSS Social Services can be appointed as the Guardian of the Person for an individual aged 18 or older deemed incompetent by the Clerk of Court. Adult Guardianship provides case management services to persons under guardianship who lack sufficient capacity to manage their affairs and communicate pertinent information on their behalf.

Adult Day Care/Day Health

Adult Daycare/ Day Health are supportive services designed to enhance community integration and stimulate activities for elderly and disabled adults. In addition, they allow the caregiver to work while the disabled individual is in a supervised environment. Adult and Family care homes are monitored to enhance senior living and quality of care.

Special Assistance In-Home Program (SAIH)

Johnston County processed 95% of applications for the SAIH program, with monthly visits and annual assessments to evaluate the cash supplement's results and ensure the individuals' safety, health, and well-being. The average caseload for SAIH since July 1, 2024 is 200. There were approximately 25 customers who received Transition Community Living (TCL) housing support. This program helps adults with serious mental illness and promotes integration into their communities.

In Home Aide Services

This program does not require Medicaid eligibility and provides for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNS) or Personal Care Services to individuals who remain in their homes to age in place. The services aim to help customers achieve or maintain a level of self-sufficiency. Referrals are made by social workers, family members, friends, and medical providers. The average hours number of in-home aide services provided to the 60 customers served are approximately 2-3 hours per day depending on their needs and funding.

Community-Based Services

The Medicaid program pays for a variety of services and supplies that assist with keeping individuals safe in their private residences as an alternative to placement in a facility. Other services that are not covered by the Medicaid program are rendered to maintain a level of self-sufficiency.

Unclaimed Bodies

The North Carolina General Statute 130A-415, allows for DSS Directors or their designee to assume possession of a deceased person who has been unclaimed for ten days or more. During the fiscal year there were 23 unclaimed bodies reported in which the agency provided for.

Adolescent Parenting Program

The Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) is designed to assist expecting and young parents with intensive and preventive services. This family centered approach promotes and strengthens support systems and develops and preserves family stability. The family focused prevention service works on effective parenting skills that deter substantiated abuse, neglect, dependency situations and unplanned pregnancies. Goals include improving maternal and infant health care, encouraging or promoting further education, and job placement, self-sufficiency and decision-making and healthy life choices.

Clinical Services

Our agency has a team of licensed clinicians who provide clinical services to adults and children eligible for our services. Our Clinicians utilize several different treatment modalities, which results in various evaluations and assessments. In addition to clinical services, our agency conducts comprehensive clinical assessments for individuals referred for substance use treatment needs and recommendations and provides Triple P services. In compliance with the federal substance use initiative, completed substance use disorder diagnostic assessments for individuals with Class H or I felonies who have applied for Food & Nutrition and Work First services.



Mental Health Awareness Day, May 2025

JOHNSTON COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA AGING PROFILE 2022



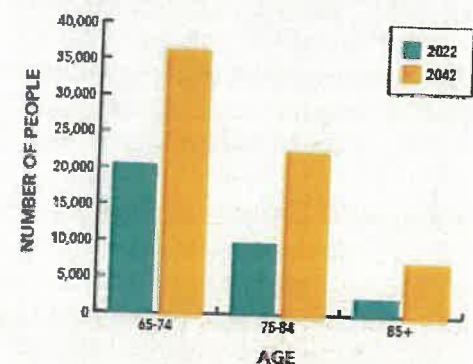
Projected Population Change, 2022-2042

Age	2022		2042		% Change 2022-2042
	County #	County %	County #	County %	
Total	233,616		346,811		48%
0-17	52,965	23%	76,568	22%	45%
18-44	83,063	36%	113,308	33%	36%
45-59	50,495	22%	69,762	20%	38%
60+	47,093	20%	87,173	25%	85%
65+	33,066	14%	66,751	19%	102%
85+	2,537	1%	7,640	2%	201%

COUNTY RANKINGS

TOTAL POPULATION	OVER 65+ YEARS OLD	MEDIAN AGE
#12 (233,616)	#16 (33,066)	39

Projected Growth, 2022-2042



Race and Ethnicity, Age 65 and Older, 2022

Race/Ethnicity	County %	NC %
White	81%	78%
Black or African American	15%	17%
American Indian	<1%	1%
Asian	<1%	2%
Some other race	3%	1%
Two or more races	1%	2%
Hispanic/Latino	4%	3%
White, no-hispanic or latino	80%	77%

Social and Economic Characteristics of Population, Age 65 and Older, 2022

Characteristics	County %	NC %
100% Poverty	9%	10%
100%-199% Poverty	21%	20%
Speak English Less Than "Very Well"	2%	3%
Veterans	17%	16%
Living Alone	26%	27%
Less Than High School	14%	13%
High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)	36%	30%
With a Disability	35%	34%
Median Household Income of Householder 65 years and Over	\$47,846	\$49,781

In-migration & Kinship Care, 2022



631

Total people 60+ who moved from other states and abroad



743

Age 60+ Grandparents responsible for Grandchildren

NC DHHS, North Carolina Aging Profiles 2022, <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/documents/2022-north-carolina-aging-profiles>

Legal Overview

Since January 2024, the County Attorney's Office provides legal services to all divisions of the Johnston County Department of Social Services and supports the agency in fulfilling its mission, vision, and goals with a family-centered, policy-driven, trauma-informed approach. Attorneys are responsible for representing the agency in court and for answering technical, legal, and resource questions. Attorneys meet regularly with the Department's management team, consult with the Director to evaluate the services provided, and collaborate with court and community stakeholders on issues to improve outcomes for agency customers. In FY 2024-2025, the County Attorney's Office prioritized outcomes that enhanced the quality and efficiency of DSS programs through legal advocacy, consultation, and education.

Key Outcomes and Achievements

1. Timely and Effective Legal Representation

The County Attorney's Office represented the agency in court proceedings, ensuring timely adjudication of cases involving child protective services, adult protective services, and overpayment recovery. A contingency plan was developed to ensure continuity of services resulting from staff departures or absences. A comprehensive review of all pending court orders was completed which resulted in process improvements to address outstanding orders and improve future processing timelines. Court outcomes demonstrated improved permanency timelines for children in foster care and success in guardianship and protective placements for vulnerable adults.

2. Strengthened Statutory Compliance and Risk Management

The County Attorney's Office assisted the DSS Director with comprehensive reviews of agency practices to ensure alignment with evolving statutory and policy mandates. This included updated guidance in child welfare, adult protective services, and public assistance programs. Our attorneys collaborated with program leaders to implement improved processes, reducing legal exposure and strengthening agency-wide compliance. The County Attorney's Office contributed to the drafting and revision of internal policies and procedures to address legal compliance and improve workflow efficiency. These procedures help ensure department access to counsel early in the process, which coupled with family-centered social work practice, has reduced petition filing. The County Attorney's Office also initiated a review of court-related documentation and practices, resulting in standardized templates and improved court readiness across multiple service areas.

3. Increased Access to Legal Consultation and Training

To build capacity and awareness among DSS staff, the County Attorney's Office participated in weekly meetings with DSS program leaders. The lead children's services attorney developed and implemented monthly in-service training sessions covering topics such as third-party discovery, permanency planning, and reasonable/diligent efforts. These weekly staffing and in-service training sessions increased staff confidence in legal processes and improved the accuracy in documentation and court preparedness.

4. Enhanced Interagency Collaboration

The County Attorney's Office strengthened partnerships with court stakeholders including the District Attorney's Office, Guardian ad Litem program, local law enforcement, respondent bar, and the judiciary to ensure effective working relationships to improve outcomes for children and families. Court collaboratives were hosted in December 2024, January 2025, and May 2025. These collaboratives fostered shared understanding of statutory responsibilities and policies, enhanced working relationships, and improved court efficiency and outcomes. With in-house attorney services and counsel's exposure to other county departments and service offerings, community resources information is able to be shared across multiple divisions to better serve families and residents of Johnston County.

Looking Ahead

In the upcoming fiscal year, the County Attorney's Office will continue to focus on proactive legal education, increased responsiveness to emerging legal challenges, and deeper integration with frontline practice. Strategic priorities include:

- Strengthen organizational structures to prepare for continued growth and deliver high-quality services.
- Refine contingency plans in case of staff absences to ensure continuity of essential services.
- Enhance in-service legal training for all agency divisions and develop legal reference guides for frontline staff.
- Enhance data collection to measure the impact of legal services on service delivery outcomes.

Through these efforts, the County Attorney's Office remains committed to supporting the Department's mission to protect and strengthen families, ensuring accountability, and upholding the integrity of public service.



*Jennifer Slusser recognized as "County Attorney of the Year"
at the NC Association of County Attorneys' Summer Conference*

Agency Events

On January 10, 2025, 355 employees and stakeholders participated in "The Lighthouse Effect" presentation. This deeply moving and thought-provoking training facilitated by Steve Pemberton, author of The Lighthouse Effect, was designed to inspire self-reflection and personal action.

Sharing his experience in the foster care system, Mr. Pemberton encouraged staff to reflect on their capacity to be a light to others through presence, empathy, and action. Survey responses showed high engagement and impact to staff in gaining skills and insights in active listening, positive communication, empathy, and understanding.



Mr. James Coleman received an award from DSS Director, Christine M. Dowdell on behalf of the Agency for his dedication and support of the Agency as the chairman of the DSS Board.

Throughout Mr. Coleman's time serving on the DSS board he has shown his support of the DSS Employees through actively participating in the projects and events being held.



Elder Awareness 2024



DSS Cookout 2024



Social Work Appreciation Month



Holiday Toy Drive 2024



Foster Parent Appreciation 2025



Child Abuse Prevention Month



Mental Health Awareness Month



Isaiah House Deed Signing at Selma Town Council



DSS Halloween Contest 2024



UCOWF Conference



Boots on the Ground Challenge

Closing Summary

I am proud of the agency's accomplishments, the DSS staff and their commitment to provide exemplary services to the customers we serve, as well as our collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. During this fiscal year we experienced successes and challenges, some of which may continue to impact the services we provide in the upcoming fiscal year. Some of those challenges include lack of placement options for youth in care, limited visitation space for families, youth placement disruptions, lack of community mental health and substance abuse services. There has also been an increase in parental abuse of opioids, the number of children and adult abuse reports, staffing shortages, legislative mandates, and lack of building space for our growing staff.

The "One Big Beautiful Bill" will bring significant changes that will impact the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps), Medicaid and financial assistance provided by some nonprofit agencies who assist in filling the gap of services to our customers. We anticipate the upcoming fiscal year will bring challenges that will impact financial resources and eligibility programs offered to our customers as well as the services some stakeholders can provide. However, we will continue to work with our county, state and federal partners to ensure compliance with these changes and implement strategies that will allow us to continue and focus on the needs of our customers.

We also recognize, as technology continues to evolve, Artificial Intelligence (AI) will provide innovative ways to assist our customers, streamline processes and enhance services. We are open to exploring how our agency can embrace this new way of doing business, as long as the agency is compliant with county IT standards, does not violate confidentiality or negatively impact the services provided to our customers.

In spite of the challenges we face, we are excited about participating in the planning and development of our new DSS building that is expected to be completed in 2027 and the upcoming opening of the Isaiah 117 House. The Executive Leadership Team will continue to assess our agency departments, collaborate with internal and external partners, identify innovative ways to help improve our workflow efficiency, service delivery, and personalize customer interactions.

Most importantly, we want to thank the community for allowing us to serve them and for the support from our county administration as well as our internal and external partners in helping us carry out the vision and mission of this agency.

Sincerely,

Christine M. Dowdell, MSW
DSS Director